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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002395

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH SPEAKER
OF THE HOUSE BANKOLE

REF: ABUJA 2295 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA Lisa Piascik for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a November 13 meeting with the Deputy
Secretary and AF A/S Frazer, Speaker of the House of

SIPDIS

Representatives, Dimeji Bankole (People's Democratic Party,
PDP - Ogun State), said the members of the House are trying
to build public confidence in the legislature by examining
its finances and creating more accountability. They would
also be looking into Constitutional amendments. Bankole said
he would like to see more incumbents re-elected to the House
to build institutional knowledge and capacity. The Speaker
hopes the new strength of the legislature will trickle down
and empower state and local governments. Bankole indicated
he would be supportive of legislation to cancel Liberia's
debt, but was concerned that the loss of Nigerian lives in
peacekeeping efforts is not generally appreciated. END
SUMMARY.

NEW ERA

12. (C) Bankole described the recent scandal surrounding the
previous Speaker, Patricia Etteh (reftel), as a "war" within
the House. Bankole said that since his election on November
1, the House has stabilized and the members are ready to get
to work. Bankole noted that his election was the first time
a Speaker has been democratically chosen within the House, as
opposed to the past practice when political strongmen imposed
their choice. Bankole said the ousting of the previous
Speaker and his subsequent election would not have been
possible without President Yar'Adua, whom he praised for
honoring the separation of powers and not interfering in the
crisis. Bankole believes Yar'Adua's actions and the positive
outcome mark the beginning of a new era of National Assembly
reform. Bankole said the public's perception of the
legislature also needs to be changed. The Speaker said that
the House will work over the coming months to prove it is no
longer corrupt and that promises of accountability were not
just words. He stressed the importance of building
confidence in the legislature starting at the grass roots
level. Bankole also noted, however, that the members of the
House must also build trust and confidence among themselves

after years of corruption and deceit.

INCUMBENT REPRESENTATIVES

13. (C) Bankole said that 80 percent of the 360 members of the House (elected in April 2007) were new and that this low incumbency rate was normal in Nigeria. He said the high turnover in the legislature makes it difficult to build up the experience necessary to function well. Bankole suggested members lose their seats for not "playing the political game" according to the PDP's rules. Bankole is hopeful he can change the rules of the game and have members rewarded for good performance, hopefully resulting in an increased retention rate of 40 to 50 percent. Bankole said that would be deemed a sign of progress.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

14. (C) The Speaker said the members are currently looking at the House's own management procedures and budget to improve fiscal responsibility within the legislature. To further enhance accountability, Bankole explained the idea behind the recently formed Constituency Project Committee. The Committee will monitor what members are doing specifically for their constituencies. They plan to establish indicators and precepts so that any project funded can be adequately monitored for progress. Bankole also described a committee called the House Budget Committee which he likened to the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee which will decide how to spend federal funds in a transparent way.

FEDERAL AND STATE ACCOUNTABILITY

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15. (C) The Deputy Speaker, Usman Bayero (PDP, Gombe State), noted that the national budget for 2008 will be approximately 1.8 trillion naira (approx. US\$15 billion) which would be divided between federal, state and local governments. He lamented that there is still little control over how state governments spend their share of the money. Bankole would like to see states and local governments exert more independence, but is skeptical they have the capacity after decades of taking orders from strong executives. He would like to establish a system of goals and milestones to monitor state and local government spending of federal funds to ensure the money directly affects the lives of people. The Speaker hopes the growing strength of the National Assembly will trickle down and inspire state and local governments. Bankole noted that the Fiscal Responsibility Bill was just signed into law by President Yar'Adua and that the legislature is encouraging state governments to adopt similar laws to monitor accountability. (The Fiscal Responsibility Act creates a general framework for budgetary planning and reporting which is intended to create fiscal transparency and accountability at all levels of government.)

CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

16. (C) Bankole said many people do not feel the current Nigerian Constitution is "their own" as it was drafted during military rule. The House intends to work on drafting amendments to the current Constitution so that it better reflects today's democracy. Bankole mentioned that in 2006 a package of 52 amendments was brought before the National Assembly, but because the former President's wildly unpopular third term proposal was included, the entire package was discredited. He believes many of those past recommendations will be resubmitted and, if started right away, there will be enough time to get many of the amendments ratified before the next election. The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Aremo Gbenga Oduwaiye (PDP, Ogun State) added that

the House wants to empower the Electoral Reform Panel as it works to update the Electoral Act of 2006.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

¶7. (C) Bankole initially hesitated when asked about legislation to cancel Liberia's debt, but he agreed that a struggling country needs a blank slate from which to start rebuilding, and that Nigeria needs stable neighbors in the region. Bankole ultimately said "not to worry" as he is sure Nigeria will eventually forgive the debt, but did not go into further detail.

¶8. (C) Bankole was concerned over Nigeria's continuing "big brother" role, referring to Nigeria's past and present peacekeeping forces (in Liberia, Sudan and potentially Somalia) and the loss of Nigerian lives already incurred from those efforts. Although Bankole supports Nigeria's continued participation in foreign peacekeeping missions, the Speaker said he would rather see additional Nigerian troops sent to the Niger Delta. Bankole also noted his disappointment in what he sees as a lack of appreciation for Nigeria's contribution to the global peacekeeping effort.

¶9. (C) In response to the Deputy Secretary's question on public views about the U.S., Bankole said Nigerians love the U.S. and want a piece of the American dream. Oduwaiye added that the number of Nigerians studying in the U.S. has increased over the past few years. Bankole noted that many students are now returning to Nigeria and sharing their experience and knowledge; this fosters greater understanding of American culture and society and helps Nigeria grow democratically.

¶10. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary

Jendayi Frazer, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs

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Lisa Piascik, Charge d'Affaires

Nyree Tripptree, Embassy Notetaker

Nigeria

Dimeji Bankole, Speaker of the House of Representatives

Usman Bayero, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives

Areemo Gbenga Oduwaiye, Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs

¶11. (U) The Deputy Secretary's staff has cleared this message.
PIASCIK